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ABSTRACT

The superintendent, as the district educational leader, has responsibility toward the board of education and instructional staff. The latter function is encouraged and monitored by superintendents who use inservice programs, central office instructional and curriculum specialists, teacher committees, principals, and consultants to identify and effect needed instructional improvement. Superintendents often complain about lack of time to improve their districts' instructional programs. The study reported in this paper attempted to identify superintendents' reasons for feeling hindered or prevented from finding time for instructional improvement. An unrestricted random sample of 120 school districts was drawn from the Ohio Directory of Public Schools. A 15-item questionnaire asking superintendents to rank possible impediments was mailed; 105 were returned, and 94 were analyzed. Two major, time-consuming obstacles were disclosed: (1) dealing with teachers' associations and (2) keeping the board happy. None of the other reasons generated more than a 11.7 percent response. Some participants' observations are included as being especially perceptive, along with a sample questionnaire. While more comprehensive research data is needed, this study clearly indicates two major impediments to superintendents' instructional leadership effectiveness. (MLH)

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1986

The superintendent of any school district is always considered the educational leader of the district. This leadership function is generally seen going in two directions from the superintendent.

First of all, it goes from the superintendent toward his board of education. Usually the superintendent is the most experienced and most highly trained educator in the district. Therefore, it is his responsibility to educate the board toward accepting the most desirable and effective instructional program for the district.

Of equal importance is the leadership that goes from the superintendent toward the instructional staff of the district. This is the leadership that is nurtured, encouraged and monitored by the superintendent that utilizes inservice programs, central office instructional and curriculum specialists, teacher committees, principals, and consultants to identify and bring about needed instructional improvement. It is this leadership function that provided the basis for this research study.

For many years the writer has heard conscientious and harried superintendents complain about the lack of time they have to devote to the actual improvement of the instructional programs in their districts. Therefore, the writer decided it might be helpful to try to identify the reasons that superintendents felt hindered or that prevented them from the time they needed to work toward instructional improvement.

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An unrestricted random sample of 120 school districts was drawn from the Ohio Educational Directory of Public Schools. The superintendents of these districts were sent the questionnaire. 105 questionnaires were returned, 94 of which were usable for statistical analysis.

The following demographic data was revealed by the questionnaire:

Type of District	Number
Local	46
Exempted Village	9
City	35
Joint Vocational	4

Age of Superintendent	Number
30-35	4
36-40	12
41-45	13
46-50	40
51-55	17
56 and over	8

Experience of Superintendent	Number
1-5 years	33
6-10 years	32
11-15 years	13
16-20 years	10
21-25 years	5
26 or more years	1

Following were the directions given to the superintendents on the questionnaire:

Listed below you will find 15 reasons that superintendents themselves have identified that hinder or prevent them from having the time needed to work at actual improvement of the instructional programs in their districts. Please examine all of these reasons. Now place a 1 by the reason that you believe most prevents you from working on instructional improvement in your district. Place a 2 by the next most important reason, a 3 by the next most important reason, and so on. You need rank only 5 reasons.

____ The time I have to spend on dealing with the teachers association, i.e. negotiations, grievances, contract management, etc.

____ The time I have to spend on keeping my Board happy, i.e. gathering information, getting answers, and doing things the Board wants me to do.

_____ The time I have to spend on problems of all kinds connected with the athletic program.

_____ The time I have to spend on the business management function--payroll, meeting sales people, bidding procedures, purchasing, etc.

_____ Frankly, I do not have the building principals who are skilled enough to help me bring about instructional improvement.

_____ Demands on my time from community groups and other community relations duties that interfere with the time that I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ The time that I spend on supervising and coordinating the work of all the non teaching personnel in this district interferes with the time that I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ The time that I spend on problems connected with the bus operation in this district interferes with the time that I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ The time that I spend in recruiting, interviewing, and other teaching personnel administrative duties interferes with the time that I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ Dealing with law suits and legal problems interferes with the time I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ School discipline problems, student and parent hearings, etc. interfere with the time I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ The time that I spend on working to pass school bond issues and tax levies interferes with the time that I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ The time that I spend working on state, federal and/or county reports, etc. interferes with the time that I need to work on instructional improvement.

_____ I am not sure that I have the necessary knowledge and skills to move the district toward instructional improvement.

_____ Given all the conflicting ideas about what the schools should do, I am not sure what would really constitute instructional improvement.

_____ Other (please write in other reasons that hinder or prevent you from working on instructional improvement).

Analysis of the data generated by the questionnaire revealed that superintendents in Ohio perceive that they have difficulty in finding the time to work toward instructional improvement that comes from two sources: (1) teachers associations and (2) boards of education.

Forty four of the superintendents (47 percent) said that the time they had to spend on dealing with the teachers association, i.e., negotiations, grievances, contract management, etc. were either the first or second reason that hindered or prevented them from working on instructional improvement. Twelve superintendents (13 percent) ranked this reason third, nine superintendents (10 percent) ranked it fourth, while an additional six superintendents (7 percent) ranked this reason fifth. Altogether, 71 of the 94 superintendents (77 percent) listed teacher association problems as either hindering or preventing them from the time they needed to work on instructional improvement. Only 23 superintendents in the total sample did not identify teacher associations as a problem that hindered or prevented them from working on instructional improvement.

The next reason chosen by superintendents in any significant number as hindering or preventing them from working on instructional improvement was, "the time I have to spend on keeping my Board happy, i.e. gathering information, getting answers, and doing things the Board wants me to do."

Forty one superintendents (43.6 percent) indicated that keeping their Boards happy was the first or second reason that hindered or prevented them from the time they needed to work on instructional improvement. Another eighteen superintendents (19.1 percent) chose this reason as third or fourth. Six superintendents (6.4 percent) chose this reason fifth. Altogether, sixty five superintendents (69.1 percent) picked "keeping their Board happy" among their top five reasons that hindered or prevented them from working on instructional improvement in their school districts. Only 29 superintendents in the sample did not see this as a problem for them.

None of the other reasons on the questionnaire was selected by more than 11.7 percent of the superintendents in the sample.

However, under "other," several superintendents took the time to write some very perceptive comments concerning their roles as instructional leaders. Following are some of these comments:

> Instructional changes that appear to teachers to increase their work or threaten their security bring negative action from the Union and the uniserve agent. I am convinced that the union power obtained from Ohio's collective bargaining law is and will be used to restrict and diminish instructional change.
>
> I do not feel that my basic responsibility is instructional improvement. I have excellent building administrators and an assistant superintendent in charge of instruction. I feel that my energies should go to the many other items in your questionnaire, particularly the first six.
>
> I am not hindered or prevented from working on instructional improvement. The only constraints are inadequate state support in terms of foundation formula and a well intentioned state department bureaucracy who deliver new requirements for their perception of quality education.
>
> We lack the financial means to provide inservice toward instructional improvement. The county office tries to help, but their people lack the curriculum foundation knowledge to complete tasks. The burden on me is too great.
>
> To rank any of the above items may suggest that improving instruction has a lower priority. Everything hinders if we let it. A superintendent has to control the external forces and place instructional improvement as the top priority if in fact he/she believes it should be. I prefer to say that the time I spend on instructional improvement hinders the time I spend keeping my Board happy or the time I spend on negotiations, grievances, etc. rather than the other way around.

Of course more comprehensive research data is needed. However, the data from this valid sample of Ohio school district superintendents reveal that these superintendents perceive that they have difficulty finding the time to work on instructional improvement that comes from two sources: (1) the time they have to spend dealing with the teachers' association and (2) the time they have to spend keeping their Boards happy.